

Suggested Trip Preparation Curriculum and Guidelines

As more Americans are making the pilgrimage to Transylvania, mental, spiritual and physical preparation for the trip are appropriate. Be ready to embrace the unexpected and celebrate the everyday miracles of a culture deeply rooted in Unitarian faith.

The following is a *suggested* progression for preparing your group for their travel in Transylvania. Depending on the size of your group and their previous experience traveling in Eastern Europe you might want to add or subtract from the suggested “curriculum”. Each session should start with a chalice lighting and end with a closing reading or appropriate words. While actually in transit, group leader(s) will want to lead periods of reflection/sharing with the group. The following are examples of sources for chalice lightings or closing readings:

Edict of Torda

Quotes from Francis David

Quotes from UUPCC Handbook

“Spirit of Life” in English and Hungarian

Session One –

View UUPCC Film *Partners in Faith* or photos taken by previous pilgrims to Transylvania. It is helpful to have one or more person who has traveled to Transylvania at the session to field questions. If this is the first trip from your congregation, perhaps there is a nearby congregation that would send a volunteer or two to talk with the group.

After viewing the film or photos open discussion about “What do you expect from your travel”?

Review itinerary, have map(s) of Transylvania/Romania available with highlighted route, if possible. Have the projected cost of the trip (land and air) available as well as a timeline for payment. It is good to have talked to your travel agent before this meeting to have a baseline price for air fare. This may change before you make your actual reservations. Be aware that some members of your group might fly into your destination city from other parts of Europe on their own. The same applies to the departure, as some folks might elect to travel further after your time in Transylvania is complete.

Things to stress at this meeting before people commit to the trip might be that the nature of this trip is one of religious pilgrimage and fellowship. You will be spending several days of intense experience with your group. Romania, and Transylvania, in particular, are in the process of emerging from decades of oppressive Communist rule. Therefore, many of the amenities available in western European countries might not be available, especially in the more rural areas. This is not a trip for people with serious medical concerns or limited walking ability.

Session Two – Basic Hungarian

Seek out someone in the community (college, community college, etc.) who has a working knowledge of Hungarian to help the group learn basic greetings, common phrases and pronunciation. Handouts with greetings, common phrases and typical names are helpful. There are several on-line sites that offer language lessons as well as inexpensive compact discs that can be purchased. Encourage the group to use basic phrases in your meetings and when e mailing one another. Just knowing a few words of Hungarian to use when meeting friends in Transylvania is greatly appreciated. This is a good point to make sure that everyone has their Passport (and that it is up to date) or is in the process of getting one. It is also a good time to remind the group about recommended immunizations – tetanus and Hepatitis – should be current. If you have any questions about immunizations consult the State Department site.

Session 3 – History of Hungary and Romania (with emphasis on Unitarians)

Your minister might be the most qualified person in your congregation to present this material. It is very useful to have a grasp of the long history of Unitarianism in Transylvania as well as the effect of the Treaty of Trianon which separated Transylvania from Hungary as a result of decisions made at the League of Nations meetings after World War I. This session should be especially helpful in developing group sensitivity to the minority status of Unitarians in Romania. Some discussion of the situation of the Roma (Gypsy) minority might also be appropriate in this session.

Session 4 – Relationship with your partner church

Current and previous Partner Church Committee members can describe the history of your partnership. This might include gifts exchanged, pulpits shared,

scholarship programs, attempted projects and communication challenges. The session might include a timeline of the partnership.

Session 5 - Tales from Previous Trips

Past travelers can share personal highlights and stories from pilgrimages and home stays. Photos and slides of villagers and significant pilgrimage attractions should be included if possible. The evening should include gift suggestions, communication, etc. Handout could be a list of families in the partner church and a map of the village if available.

Session 6 – Getting Ready for Takeoff (one month before the trip).

This meeting can cover all remaining questions including packing and travel suggestions. A nurse or a doctor from the congregation might give travelers information on avoiding common travel ills and what OTC meds to have on hand. It is important to stress the risks of sexual contact and alcohol consumption. Sexual relations should be strongly discouraged. HIV and other STD's are rampant in eastern Europe and respect for ourselves and our hosts should preclude sexual contact. Palinka, the local home distilled liquor, will be offered at most meals and social occasions. It is a highly distilled alcohol product and should be consumed with care, if at all. Although it might be offered many times during the trip, a polite but firm refusal is appropriate. A demonstration of what to pack in one carry-on bag and backpack will help group members before boarding. "Less really is more" when traveling. Have fun learning what you can do without!!

Sunday Service send off – A portion of the service held nearest to your departure date recognizing the pilgrims and their mission might be appropriate for your congregation.

Report back to the congregation - This can take the form of a special Sunday service when each pilgrim (depending on the size of the group) can share something of significance from their experience. If your group has a "videographer", an evening presentation of the edited video with eastern European desserts and coffee is a nice way to share your experience. If your church has gallery space, a show of photos from the group gives wide exposure to the trip. These events can be coordinated with a "Partner Church Weekend".

Things to be sure your group is aware of -

Food is plentiful but indoor plumbing is not always available. Breakfast can be a combination of bread, butter, jams, cheese, sausages, hard boiled eggs, pickles, cucumbers and peppers. The dinner might be served much later than we are accustomed to and usually has at least one dish that is fried. Potatoes, cabbage, bread, beef and pork are plentiful. Vegetarians will need to be adaptable and creative. As more Americans travel in Transylvania there is more accommodation for special diet needs, but this might not always be the case depending upon where your travel. It is a good idea to pack several “power bars” in your bag as an emergency energy/food source. Bottled water is a “must” in the villages. Be aware that “fizzy” water has a high sodium content.

Roads in rural areas are often unpaved and can have very large potholes that can be quite jarring to your vehicle and body. Streets in most villages are not paved and farm animals make their daily treks from hillside pastures to their homes in the mornings and evenings. When it rains the streets can be quite a mix of mud and animal droppings. Shoes that can be easily cleaned (Crocs, Keens, any kind of sneaker) work well in this scenario. A pair of sturdy hiking/walking shoes is recommended as well for hiking and walking on cobblestones in the older cities. If you are hiking in mountainous areas bears are something to be very aware of. Be sure to stay with members of your group when hiking.

Sanitation and personal hygiene can be quite different, especially in village situations. If your stay includes time in a hotel, most showers will be European style with a showerhead attached to a pole that can be removed to spray your body as needed. If you are fortunate enough to experience a home stay, the facilities might be limited to an outdoor privy and a washbasin that will contain hot water from the woodburning stove. Some homes will have “modern” bathrooms but your host will probably have to build a wood fire under a 5 to 10 gallon water tank to heat water for your shower. Air conditioning is a rarity. A small bottle of liquid hand sanitizer is good to have in your backpack.

Be sure to bring clothing that is easily rinsed out and that will dry over night. Dark colors are optimal and pants with zip off legs that convert easily

to shorts or long pants. Take advantage of any location where you will be staying for more than one night to do laundry. Most camping stores (REI, EMS, HTO and Campmor) will have an elastic clothesline that can be strung out in the bathroom. Several of these hooked together make an excellent “group” drying line.

Most American supermarkets and drug stores have deodorant, toothpaste, lotion, etc. in small containers that are TSA approved for carry-on luggage. If you plan to travel in carry-on luggage only (recommended), place all of these items in a one-quart resealable plastic bag before packing your luggage. Your tour is not about being a “fashion statement” but ease of movement from place to place and comfort. For this purpose, one piece of carry-on luggage and a back pack work well for many travelers.

Be very sure that any prescription medications that you will need for the trip are up to date and will be enough for your entire stay. There is very little to no possibility of filling prescriptions in Romania.

Essential Items for Group Leader and Participants*

*see packing list

Be sure that **copies** of airline tickets, passports, all credit/debit cards, travel insurance and emergency information are given to group leader as well as in a safe place with each participant. It is a good idea to have a visual “passport check” for the group at the start and end of each day. Women should be especially aware that small handbags hung on the shoulder can be easily stolen. Do not place handbags or backpacks over the back of your chair in a public place! Money, passports and credit cards are best kept in an under the clothes pack or in a tightly secured velcro pocket.

Having a backup battery for cameras is essential. There will be little opportunity for a replacement while touring. Be sure that group members have a plug adapter/ currency converter with which to charge their electronic gear.

Check on the status of which currency the countries that you will be traveling in are using. A small amount of cash (dollars) will get you started, but you will need to access your debit account (ATM) at the airport or railroad station to get some local currency. Although Hungary and Romania

are both moving to the European Union, the Euro might not be accepted yet.
Contact the Partner Church Office for updated information on currency.

Packing List

Essentials

- _____ Airline tickets (with copies in backpack & to Leader)*
- _____ Passport*
- _____ Wallet
- _____ Euro and dollars
- _____ Money card*
- _____ Copy of Travel Insurance*
- _____ Contact number to report lost card(s)*
- _____ Prescription and OTC medicines
- _____ Plug adapter and all "tethers" for camera, iPod, etc.
- _____ Camera with extra batteries and memory card
- _____ Battery charger
- _____ Journal and pen
- _____ Watch with alarm function (new battery)

Self-Care Items

- _____ Glasses, sunglasses, contacts lenses
- _____ Sanitary supplies
- _____ Anti-bacterial hand gel or wipes
- _____ Lotion and/or sunscreen
- _____ Earplugs
- _____ Quick dry towel and washcloth
- _____ Clothes line & spot remover

Toiletries

- _____ Toothbrush and toothpaste
- _____ Liquid bath soap
- _____ Shampoo and conditioner
- _____ Sunblock
- _____ Deodorant
- _____ Cosmetics
- _____ Razor and shaving cream
- _____ Brush or comb

Clothes

- _____ Quick drying underwear
- _____ T shirts
- _____ Shorts
- _____ Church outfit
- _____ Shoes (2 pair maximum)
- _____ Light weight long sleeve shirt
- _____ Cap or hat
- _____ PJ's
- _____ Lightweight jacket

Miscellaneous

- _____ iPod
- _____ Cards, games
- _____ Gifts for hosts
- _____ Hackey Sack
- _____ Book(s)
- _____ Flashlight
- _____ Photo book
- _____ English/Hungarian Phrase Book
- _____ Power Bars